

Inspection report for North Portslade Children's Centre

Local authority	Brighton and Hove
Inspection number	384031
Inspection dates	18–19 August 2011
Reporting inspector	Joanne Caswell HMI

Centre governance	Local authority
Centre leader	Martina O'Leary
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Centre address	North Portslade Children's Centre The Rise Portslade Brighton BN41 2PY
Telephone number	01273 294062
Fax number	Not applicable
Email address	northportsladecc@brighton-hove.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Acorn Nursery EY318095

The inspection of this Sure Start Children's Centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

Published: August 2011



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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with the centre management team, the local authority, health professionals, representatives from the advisory group, frontline staff, parents and carers and partner agencies.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

North Portslade Children's Centre is a phase one centre which was designated in September 2008. The centre operates from purpose-built premises in the North Portslade area of Brighton. It serves one of the 30% most deprived areas in the country. The centre links closely to the gateway centre in South Portslade which is connected to the local library. There is a high level of need in the area and housing consists primarily of local authority homes, rented accommodation and low cost housing for key workers. Unemployment levels are high within the centre's area and the numbers of families relying on benefits is higher than the city-wide average. The area is less ethnically diverse than other areas of the city, with the majority of families of White British heritage. Children's levels of skills and understanding on entry to school are often lower than those expected for their age.

The local authority and Primary Care Trust provide governance to the centre, arranged through a Section 75 agreement. North Portslade Children's Centre is a health-led model, which provides the full core offer services and has health professionals, such as midwives and health visitors, operating from the centre. Full daycare provision, for children aged from six weeks to five years, is delivered by Acorn Nursery which is open from 8.00am to 6.00pm throughout the year. An advisory group is in place and includes membership of parents and carers, partner agencies, the local authority, stakeholders and multi-disciplinary professionals.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for users and the wider community

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

The centre's capacity for sustained improvement, including the quality of its leadership and management

2

Main findings

North Portslade Children's Centre provides high-quality provision with several outstanding aspects, particularly in the promotion of community health, the safeguarding of users and partnerships with other agencies. The centre offers an extremely welcoming environment where users feel extremely safe and benefit from an excellent range of services. A key strength of the centre is the health-led model which results in 100% of families within the centre's reach area benefiting from services and receiving support. In addition, the excellent links with partner agencies ensure families receive a fully cohesive, integrated range of provision. All partners who spoke to inspectors praised the work of the centre. One partner described the centre staff as 'fantastic'.

The centre is having a very positive impact on improving outcomes for families. Centre staff and health care professionals are persistent and highly successful in the promotion of healthy lifestyles, and targeted support is given to those identified as being at most in need. Constant monitoring of the most vulnerable ensures safeguarding arrangements are extremely robust and families receive the help they need, particularly at times of crisis. The excellent range of services ensures that centre users feel supported and rapid improvements are made in keeping children and families safe. The impact of services is measured on an individual basis and case study evidence shows the good improvements in outcomes for families.

The care, guidance and support offered to all families, particularly those identified as being most vulnerable, is outstanding. Staff provide an exceptional level of support and the assessment of individual need is robust and effective. Health professionals and early years visitors quickly develop trusting relationships with all families and empower the most vulnerable to seek help. Consequently, those who are introduced

to services initially through home visits and outreach work quickly develop confidence to access a full range of services directly from the centre. One parent told inspectors, 'The centre has been a great support. I can come up at any time and the staff are here to help.'

The Early Years Foundation Stage provision offered by Acorn Nursery is outstanding. Children benefit from exceptional care and highly effective planning which enable children to make rapid improvements in their learning from their initial starting points. Early years provision within the children's centre is of good quality. Children benefit from a good selection of activities and play experiences which have a positive impact on their learning. The strong focus on planning and assessment in the nursery is not fully replicated in a few early years activities operated by the centre. As a result, sometimes the crèche and Stay and Play groups miss opportunities to observe and monitor children's progress towards the early learning goals of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

The centre makes a good contribution towards improving the economic stability of parents and carers. Excellent links with partner agencies ensure centre users have access to training courses and opportunities to seek help in gaining employment. As a result, some parents are now developing skills by working as volunteers and returning to employment.

The centre management team is well developed and all leaders are clear in their lines of responsibility and accountability. Resource management is strong and early identification of need ensures the centre adapts its services appropriately to meet changing requirements. Staff are enthusiastic and highly committed to meeting the needs of local families. They have high levels of expertise and are supported by good professional development. Centre leaders and the advisory group have a good understanding of the needs of the wider community and the specific needs of vulnerable groups. Data are used effectively to measure impact on families on an individual basis. However, analysis of data to measure the long term impact on services on a group basis is harder for the centre to evidence. Therefore, it is harder to assess whether all families are making as rapid improvements as each other. Self-evaluation procedures are generally effective based on analysis of service provision. The centre knows its own areas for development and is working to address these. As a result, the centre demonstrates good value for money and good capacity to improve.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- With local authority support, gather a more complete profile of the long-term impact of the centre's services to enable a more rigorous analysis of data on improvements made for families from vulnerable groups.

- Replicate the excellent Early Years Foundation Stage provision in Acorn Nursery into all centre activities to ensure children's progress towards the early learning goals is consistently monitored in all groups.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Outcomes for centre users are at least good in all respects and outstanding in being healthy and staying safe. Rapidly improving health outcomes are the result of excellent support from midwifery services, health visitors, early years visitors and other specialists, such as speech and language therapists. The promotion of healthy living and adopting healthy lifestyles underpins the work of the centre. Excellent support for breastfeeding results in exceptional numbers of mothers breastfeeding babies for longer periods and develop an increased understanding of the health benefits for mother and baby. The centre works exceptionally well with other agencies, such as Active for Life, to promote physical activity and healthy eating programmes. Consequently, families develop an excellent understanding of nutrition and undertake frequent exercise to reduce obesity levels and encourage healthy routines. Snacks provided for children are consistently healthy and nutritious. Targeted support programmes help families to clearly understand how to prepare healthy and nutritious meals. One parent told inspectors, 'I didn't know how to cook before. The centre has helped me to be able to cook for my family.' Parents recently took part in developing the centre's garden and planted their own fruits and vegetables which they now use in cookery activities. An exceptional range of courses and specialist support groups help to ensure strong emotional well-being for both children and adults.

The safety and welfare of centre users, including those identified as being most vulnerable, are a high priority for all centre staff. Early identification and comprehensive preventative work have resulted in an evident decrease in the numbers of children requiring a child protection plan. Agencies and support services work together intrinsically to support families and enable parents and carers to keep their children safe and secure. The Common Assessment Framework is used exceptionally well and this results in children's needs being consistently monitored. Centre users were keen to tell inspectors how safe and secure they feel within the centre. Excellent links with the emergency services help parents and carers to understand safety issues within the home. For example, the Fire Safety Officer from East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service visits regularly to talk about safety and helps parents and carers understand how to protect children from the risks of fire, burns and scalding. Many parents told inspectors how they had learnt so much from this and made improvements in their own homes as a result of this information. As a result, the numbers of children having accidents and sustaining injuries is reducing.

Children who attend Acorn Nursery are making exceptional progress in their learning. Excellent provision is made for learning both inside and outside. However, children who do not attend the nursery receive variable experiences within the centre.

Increasing numbers at the Stay and Play sessions and the drop-in groups for parents with toddlers reflect how much centre users enjoy activities. The targeted Family Learning courses provide good information for parents to understand how to promote children's learning through quality play experiences. The local childminders play an integral part in improving children's learning and development through rigorous assessment and high-quality Early Years Foundation Stage provision during the weekly childminders' group. Links with training providers and community facilities, such as the local college, lead to increased opportunities for parents and carers to undertake courses and develop new skills. This is having a positive impact on their employability as some parents have been successful in setting up their own businesses.

Children behave very well within the centre and there are positive relationships between all parents. Centre users told inspectors how they had made new friends and attending activities had reduced their feelings of isolation and loneliness. There are good procedures in place to enable parents to share ideas and offer suggestions to the centre for future activities. For example, many parents asked centre staff for increased activities during the school holidays, which staff responded positively to. All centre users told inspectors how they feel listened to and their views and ideas are always acknowledged and respected. Some procedures are in place for children to share their views and begin to shape future service provision. For example, children use cameras to take photographs of their favourite things and activities.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	1
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	2
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	2

How good is the provision?

1

The centre provides an excellent range of integrated services and activities which are well matched to the needs of users. Parents are viewed as individuals and the centre assesses their needs effectively to ensure those with the greatest need, and those

identified as being most vulnerable, receive a comprehensive range of targeted support. Although assessment of need is robust and is clearly measured, sometimes greater emphasis is given towards assessment of health. As a result, children's progress towards the early learning goals of the Early Years Foundation Stage is not always routinely monitored and planned for within the centre's activities.

Excellent relationships are established with an extensive range of key partners, including health, social care, children's services, education and the Family Information Service. These ensure that families receive a fully coordinated range of services and are quickly referred to help when it is needed. Centre staff carry out an exceptional range of home visits and outreach work to successfully support the most vulnerable and those who are harder to engage with. Specialist services ensure all families are receiving the professional advice and support they need. For example, a designated midwife works across the city to offer support to pregnant teenage mothers to be. There is specialist support in place to work with the Traveller community to ensure all children's needs are assessed and families are signposted to relevant services. Specialist groups offer support to families who speak English as an additional language. Children and adults with disabilities are fully integrated into all the centre's activities and there are designated groups available to offer specialist advice.

Children supported by the Common Assessment Framework are extremely well cared for through excellent inter-agency working. Collaborative partnership working and frequent exchange of information ensure children are extremely well protected and families receive the relevant support. Children subject to a child protection plan benefit from exceptional improvement in their outcomes as a result of the centre's involvement. This is because staff's knowledge of protocols and multi-agency working is exceptional. Supported childcare places play a vital role in many cases in providing respite for the parent and child when needed. One parent told inspectors, 'The whole family has benefited from coming into the centre.'

There is a strong focus on purposeful learning and development for all centre users. Excellent links with partner agencies, such as the local community college, Jobcentre Plus and training providers, have a positive impact on improving parents' self-confidence. Centre users access a good range of courses and this is having a positive impact on their parenting skills and personal well-being. Parents seek advice easily and the parent involvement worker supports them in undertaking volunteering roles and working towards developing key skills which assist them in gaining employment.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning,	2

development and enjoyment for all users	
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	1
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Governance arrangements are clear and effective. The local authority provides a clear framework for the centre and has a good strategic overview. The advisory group is representative of a range of partners involved in the centre and is chaired by a parent. The group works well together to provide a cohesive approach to leadership and is beginning to challenge the centre leaders effectively. Senior managers have a good understanding of where the strengths and priorities of the centre lie and are proactive in working to address these. Resources are used extremely effectively and are closely targeted to support individual need. The health-led model provides an exceptional range of services and plays a significant part in improving health outcomes and keeping families safe. Value for money is good as services are linked appropriately and effective deployment of services prevents duplication and additional cost.

The process of self-evaluation is embedded at every level and staff regularly reflect on practice and identify ways to improve. Data analysis is good and ensures all families, particularly those who are most in need, access services and are supported. However, the current procedures for presenting data restrict the centre from explicitly demonstrating that all groups are benefiting as quickly as others. As a consequence, evidence of long term impact on improving outcomes for some vulnerable groups has been harder for the centre to demonstrate.

Safeguarding procedures are exemplary. All staff are exceptionally committed to ensuring children's welfare and keeping families safe. Highly effective outreach work enables families to easily seek help at an early stage. Support services are readily available to those families experiencing crisis, such as domestic abuse, financial insecurity, unemployment and housing issues. All staff are highly trained in safeguarding procedures and the centre offers an exceptionally welcoming, safe and secure environment. Risk assessment procedures are excellent. Rigorous staff recruitment measures ensure all staff and volunteers are fully vetted and deemed safe to work with children.

Inclusive practice is evident throughout the centre. The premises are easily accessible and staff ensure they are fully aware of each family's personal needs. Children achieve extremely well within the nursery and the gap between the most disadvantaged and the rest is closing each year. Excellent links with other agencies ensure children and adults with disabilities are fully supported. For example, the

centre works closely with the Seaside View Centre where services from health, education and social care are joined together to meet the needs of disabled children and their families and carers. A recent targeted promotion has increased the numbers of fathers and male carers accessing the centre. The centre obtains specific information about each family and openly celebrates cultural diversity and ethnicity. It has links with a translation service and offers interpretation of centre literature. The library service works closely with the centre to offer dual-language books when requested. However, sometimes books, posters and leaflets in different languages and formats are not freely displayed within the centre.

User engagement is good. Parents and carers value the centre and there are good procedures in place for them to share their views. For example, they provide feedback in a number of ways including through the Parents' Voice and through the parent involvement worker. Some parents and carers have been empowered to start up their own parent-led groups and are becoming increasingly confident in sharing their views and shaping future services.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood	2
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	1
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	1
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	2
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	1
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	2

Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

None.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected North Portslade Children's Centre on 18 and 19 August 2011. We judged the centre to be good overall. We would like to thank those of you who took the time to meet with us. It was very useful to speak with you and to hear what the centre means to you and your community.

Your children's centre has many good features and some that are outstanding. Procedures for promoting the healthy development of children and adults are excellent. Centre staff form excellent partnerships with other health professionals. This ensures you and your families develop extremely healthy lifestyles.

The centre plays an exceptional part in keeping children safe and reducing accidents. The centre's leaders have worked extremely hard to form partnerships with other agencies which provide an excellent range of services which help you and your families at times of crisis. Those of you who spoke to us during the inspection told us how safe and secure you feel at the centre and that the care, guidance and support you receive from staff are exceptional. We noticed how well the different agencies work together and share information to ensure you and your families receive the appropriate levels of support. The range of services provided by the centre is excellent.

The Early Years Foundation Stage provision provided by Acorn Nursery is outstanding. There are many good aspects of early years care within the centre, such as the Family Learning courses and the different range of groups. However, we noted that staff miss opportunities to ensure the excellent practice implemented in the nursery is repeated in the children's centre. For example, we observed that sometimes when children attend the Stay and Play groups and the crèche, staff do not always plan activities based around their knowledge of children's progress within the Early Years Foundation Stage. As a result, children have variable experiences between the nursery and the children's centre. We have asked the centre management team to address this.

The managers lead the centre very well and they know what it needs to do to improve further. They regularly review the centre's activities and ask for your ideas for future activities and suggestions. You told us how well the centre managers listen to you and welcome your feedback. We found the centre staff know the local community well and are very good at arranging services to meet individual need. The centre managers collect a range of data and information which shows the positive impact the centre is having on local families. However, the centre has not yet implemented a system which shows how it tracks the long term impact of its services on groups of families. We have asked the local authority and the centre to address this.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you very much again for your participation with the inspection and wish you and your families the very best for the future.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.